

Pocahontas

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\* John Johnson, whose home was at Marlins Bottom, heard that corn had matured in Nicholas. He started on foot to Nicholas, but lost his way in the Black Mountains. He was lost for nine days, but finally made his way to a house. There he was given food gradually until he could take a full meal. He made the trip to Nicholas, brought back the seed corn which he planted one of the first crops grown in Pocahontas.

By the early part of the century corn could be ripened in the county, and since the people preferred corn meal to hominy meal, many grist and saw mills were built.

Some of the best known of these mills were: The two mills at Millpoint, built by the Cackleys. The lower mill being built by Valentine Cackley, who also promoted other industries such as a tannery, a tin hammer and a store. This was around 1830. The upper mill was built by Joseph Cackley in 1834 but was later sold to Sampson Matthews.

The Poage Mill on Knapps Creek. This mill was built in the late part of the 18th century by James Poage. When he emigrated to Kentucky, he sold it to Peter Lightner. Lightner improved it and for years accommodated a wide circle of customers. The Henry Harper mill succeeded this mill. The burrs used by this mill are on Cummings Creek, having been taken there by Price McComb. They are believed to be among the oldest in the county. These millstones were made by Adam Sharratt near Friels on the Greenbrier River. Sharratt also had a mill on Greenbrier River.

Dilley's mill, eight miles from Huntersville on Thorny Creek was built by Henry Dilley one of the four Dilley brothers who were among Pocahontas County's earliest pioneers. This mill was kept in the possession of the Dilleys throughout its years of service to the public, and the farm on which it stands is still in their possession.

The Michael Daugherty mill on Mill Run near Sunset. This is believed to be the first tub mill, propelled by water anywhere in this whole region. It was patronized by all sections of upper Pocahontas and had the reputation of being one of the best of its kind. Sometimes these tub mills were put on runs that had only sufficient water during the rainy season. For such mills a long hollow log was often used for trunking to carry the water to the wheel. These mills did not grind so much but their product was the sweetest and best obtainable. Michael Daugherty was one of the first of the nobility to settle on Knapps Creek. He was not only able to pay his own passage to America, but to hire the services of those who sold themselves as indented servants for a certain period of time.

Swago Mill operated by Jonathan McNeill. He was the eldest son of Thomas McNeill who came to Swago around 1769 and appears to have been an enterprising person. Milling, weaving, fulling cloth and powder making was carried on under his supervision. Coverlets woven by one Jones were still in use fifty years or more after they were woven. This mill is now held by Judge George McClintic, though of course its no longer in use.

There were many other grist mills. David James one of the first men to live on Droop Mountain had a mill. James Wanless a local minister operated two grist mills. Henry Clark had a mill on Spring Creek, but I haven't been able to get any authentic information about them. In fact, in every community of the county there were mills at one time or another. Mills have been placed on almost every stream of water large enough to turn a small wheel if only during the rainy season.

The burrs or stones for many of these mills were made from sandstone found in this county in such great quantity and of unusual hardness. Calvin Price has a pair of these mill stones made more than a century ago by John Hannah of Elk, for the mill that was on the Varner place on the Big Spring Fork of Elk R. They were given to Mr. Price by the late Samuel Varner when he sold his farm. They are about 30 inches in diameter, and weigh over 100 lbs. each. Mr. Price believes they are made of this Droop sandstone found here in the county.

However, as soon as it was possible, the home made millstones were replaced with imported stones. French burrs appear to have been the desired ones in the more permanent mills that did custom grinding. The early settler was a resourceful man and if he could not get the imported ones he made them from material at hand.

About the Varner Mill, the story goes that John Hannah built the outfit complete in one day except the "jigging thing". That appears to have been the bark or board attached to the bottom, stationary stone, down which spouted the meal. These mills served well their day and an occasional one can be found still standing, though not in use. (Some of these mills were repaired and used by the moonshiners during the days of prohibition.)

Aside from these grist mills there were also powder mills located on many of the mill runs of the county. The original name of Mill Run on Lanty McNeel's place between Hillsboro and Beard, was Powder Mill Run. The site of the power mill was just above where the county road crosses. The powder maker was a man by the name of Hannah. He had a peculiar and effective line of sales talk. He would remark that he made powder and had plenty of it, and would sell it, but that many of the hunters did not like his product, in fact he did not particularly care to use it himself. This of

course was not true as to what was the matter with the powder. His

powder was

reply would be that it was too quick. A quick powder of course was the one most desired for the old type of mountain rifle.

Thomas McNeill, the Swago pioneer, maintained considerable of a powder plant on Swago Creek, near the residence of Squire Rogers. He boiled his salt petre from the rich soil to be found in the limestone caves of this region, particularly the cave on the McClintic lands not far from the residence of Lee Overholt. The proper amounts of sulphur, nitrogen, charcoal and what not were compounded together and the paste had to be mixed like the lady beats a cake. Thomas McNeill had a mill to do this stirring and beating by water power, and to grind the mass into powder after it was dry. One day he had a big stirring of powder on a grinding and went home to dinner. Something went wrong: somehow a spark was generated, and the whole thing, mill and all, blew up.

Information: History of Pocahontas County - Price  
and from old copies of the Pocahontas Times dated  
August 13, 1931.

The first business of any kind established at Marlins Bottom (Marlinton) was a combined saw mill and carding mill built by James A. Price before the Civil War. It was located on the slough along the road leading to Campbelltown, just opposite the home of A. C. Pifer. It was run from water from Stony Creek. An effort to augment this power by water from Greenbrier River from an intake just below the mouth of Stony Creek failed, and the plant itself was washed away in the flood of 1877. This mill was in charge of a man by the name of James E. A. Gibbs, who was a man of the tenant class and who barely made a living for himself and a large family.

From the Pocahontas Times - 1923.

A few families, such as John R. Flemmens on Red Lick Mountain made hundreds of pounds of maple sugar every year. It was stirred until it pulverized and became as light as brown sugar. Much of it was taken to